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**Operational Art  
In The Sioux War of 1876**

**A Monograph  
by  
Major James W. Shufelt, Jr  
Armor**



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**School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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## ABSTRACT

OPERATIONAL ART IN THE SIOUX WAR OF 1876 by MAJ James W. Shufelt, Jr., USA, 67 pages.

This monograph discusses the role of operational art in the Sioux War of 1876, the U.S. Army's largest campaign between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. This campaign, often overlooked in the historical study of operational art, demonstrates the successful application of operational art in a nontraditional campaign: the U.S. Army's defeat of the Northern Sioux Indians and their allies. This campaign also demonstrates how operational art can lead to operational victory, despite repeated tactical failures.

The monograph first defines operational art, based on emerging U.S. Army doctrine, and then reviews its role in three campaigns that served as models for the Army's operations in the Sioux War of 1876: Grant's 1864-1865 campaign to defeat the Confederacy, the Southern Plains War of 1868-1869, and the Red River War of 1874-1875. The plans and execution of the Sioux War of 1876 are then reviewed and analyzed utilizing the definition of operational art and modern concepts for operational planning. The causes of failure in the 1876 campaign are then analyzed, based on Cohen and Gooch's methodology for analysis of military failure, followed by explanation of the campaign's ultimate success.

The monograph concludes that the Frontier Army's success in this campaign demonstrates successful application of operational art, despite many errors in planning and execution committed by General Sheridan and his subordinates. Additional lessons from this campaign include the danger of blindly applying previously successful models for operations, the preeminent role of the operational commander, and the validity of operational art in campaigns against unconventional foes.

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## **Section 1 - Introduction**

While most modern American military officers know of the 25 June 1876 defeat of Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and the Seventh Cavalry Regiment at the Little Big Horn River, few would admit familiarity with the origins, conduct, or outcome of the conflict in which the Custer Massacre occurred - the U.S. Army's 1876 campaign to defeat the Northern Sioux Indians. This lack of familiarity with the U.S. Army's largest campaign between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War is regrettable not only for its importance in American westward expansion, but also for the lessons that analysis of this conflict reveals for modern campaign planners. The Sioux War of 1876 is similarly significant for modern students of operational art because of this war's linkage in design and leadership to General Ulysses S. Grant's successful 1864-1865 campaign against the Confederacy.

Considered by some modern historians as the first American example of operational art, Grant's campaign against the Confederacy was the model in design and spirit for two successful post Civil War military campaigns against the Plains Indians: the Southern Plains War of 1868-1869 and the Red River War of 1874-1875. Despite these successes, the Army's 1876 campaign against the Sioux was initially disastrous, highlighted by defeats at the Powder River, Rosebud Creek, and the Little Big Horn River. Recovering from these setbacks, the Army eventually succeeded in its campaign against the Sioux, driving the Indians back to government reservations by the Spring of 1877.

Simple explanation of the Army's initial failure and ultimate victory in 1876 is confused by a century of emotional debates, personal defenses by key participants, and public focus on the Custer Massacre. Explanation of final success is similarly difficult. While the Army's ultimate victory in this operation was not caused by the conscious application of the modern concept of operational art, aspects of this concept were present in the Army's operations against the Indians. However, the initial failure of a campaign so closely linked with Grant's seminal campaign demonstrates limitations in the modern concepts of operational art and campaign plan design and execution. The resulting research question utilized in this study is: did the United States Army's 1876 campaign against the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians demonstrate successful application of operational art?

To answer the research question, Section Two of this study explains modern concepts of operational art and campaign planning, based on current and emerging military doctrine. Section Two also reviews Grant's 1864-1865 campaign against the Confederacy, highlighting the role of operational art. Section Three reviews the 1876 campaign's post Civil War antecedents: the Southern Plains War of 1868-1869 and the Red River War of 1874-1875. This discussion is followed by review of the U.S. Army's 1876 campaign against the Sioux Indians and their allies. Section Four analyzes the Army's initial failure in 1876, utilizing the methodology for analysis of military failure presented in Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch's Military Misfortune.<sup>2</sup> Section Four concludes with an explanation of the ultimate success of the 1876 campaign. Section Five analyses the 1876 campaign utilizing the definition of



operational art and planning fundamentals from FM 100-5, Operations.<sup>3</sup> The study ends with Section Six, conclusions and recommendations.

## **Section 2 - The origins of Operational Art**

Operational art is a doctrinal construct that embraces the purpose, organization, and structure of military campaigns. Over the last decade, this concept has become a cornerstone of U.S. Army doctrine. The 1993 final draft version of FM 100-5, the U.S. Army's primary doctrinal manual, defines this concept as "... the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of war or theater of operations through the design, organization, and execution of campaigns and major operations."<sup>4</sup>

Operational art is not an automatic component of military operations; it must be appropriate, consciously developed, and properly implemented. To assist in explanation of this concept, FM 100-5 provides requirements for its successful application: broad vision, anticipation, an understanding of ends to means, and effective joint and combined cooperation.<sup>5</sup> Successful actualization of operational art demands commanders who see beyond individual battles and visualize the conduct of military operations distributed in time and space. Another component is the commander's ability to anticipate the result of tactical engagements and likely enemy responses and implement or adjust his plan of operations accordingly. The most significant component of operational art is the commander's comprehension of the

linkage between ends to means - the relationship between campaign objectives and available military forces and actions.

Application of the concept of operational art is the focus of James J. Schneider's "Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and Emergence of Operational Art."<sup>6</sup> In this document, Schneider discusses the theoretical and practical differences between operational art and classical military strategy, proposes preconditions for the successful accomplishment of operational art, and argues that Grant's 1864-1865 campaign to defeat the Confederacy was the first successful demonstration of operational art. According to Schneider, the key characteristic that distinguishes operational art from classical military strategy is the conscious employment of military forces in deep distributed operations, demonstrating the operational commander's deliberate intent to attack enemy objectives throughout the depth and width of a theater of operations.<sup>7</sup> As Schneider explains, "operational art . . . became the planning, execution and sustainment of temporally and spatially distributed maneuvers and battles, all viewed as one organic whole."<sup>8</sup> Schneider further proposes eight conditions necessary for the practice of operational art:

1. The distributed operation
2. The distributed campaign
3. Continuous logistics
4. Instantaneous command and control
5. Operationally durable formations
6. Operational vision
7. Distributed enemy
8. Distributed deployment<sup>7</sup>

The importance of operational art in modern Army doctrine is further demonstrated by its inclusion in FM 100-5's discussion of modern campaign planning.

According to FM 100-5, consideration of the fundamentals of modern military planning by commanders and staffs ensures that the components and requirements of operational art are considered and applied in military campaigns. To assist proper planning, FM 100-5 includes eight planning fundamentals; the following six fundamentals are useful for analysis of the Army's 1876 campaign: mission, commander's intent, estimates, concept of operations, concepts of operational design, and sequencing operations.<sup>9</sup>

Given the definition of operational art, Schneider's conditions for operational art, and selected fundamentals for effective campaign planning, Grant's 1864-1865 campaign against the Confederacy demonstrates successful application of operational art. The campaign plan was deceptively simple (see Map #1, Appendix A). The main effort consisted of the attack by Major General George Meade's Army of the Potomac south into Virginia to defeat General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, with supporting attacks into the Shenandoah Valley and toward Richmond. Additional supporting attacks focused on the capture of Atlanta and the destruction of its defending army, and the capture of Mobile. None of the planned Union Army operations were original ideas, nor were Confederate responses unanticipated; the novel nature of the campaign was the combination of operations to achieve a single strategic objective: defeat of the Confederacy.<sup>10</sup>

Schneider contends that the characteristics of operational art were present in Grant's campaign to defeat the Confederacy. For example, the movement of Grant's main effort, Meade's army, was a distributed operation because Meade's army

continued to advance southward, despite tactical defeats, ". . . for the sake of freedom of action, rather than for the purpose of positional advantage and annihilation."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the distributed operations of the various Union armies were woven into a unified, yet distributed campaign designed to defeat the Confederacy through the collective results of Union operations, orchestrated by Schneider's "operational genius:" Grant.<sup>12</sup>

Grant's genius could not have guaranteed the success of this campaign, Schneider continues, without the continuous logistics support facilitated by the American Industrial Revolution and the American railroad infrastructure.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the near instantaneous command and control capability provided by the telegraph system enabled Grant to monitor distributed Union operations and direct adjustments.<sup>14</sup> These factors combined to create the army, vice the Napoleonic corps, as the operationally durable formation of this war.

Grant's operational vision was the key characteristic of operational art in this campaign, according to Schneider. As Schneider explains, Grant had a unique capability to perceive the operational situation and arrive at a correct interpretation of reality.<sup>15</sup> Grant's abilities were reinforced and complemented, Schneider continues, by his highly capable personal and shadow staffs.<sup>16</sup>

The last two components of operational art, distributed enemy and distributed deployment, were also present in Grant's 1864 campaign. Grant could fight a distributed campaign because the Confederate forces and resources were distributed

from Texas to the Atlantic shore, Schneider explains. Similarly, the Union forces available to Grant were widely distributed around the periphery of the Confederacy.<sup>17</sup>

Despite Schneider's use of Grant's campaign to demonstrate operational art, the presence of operational art in Grant's operations does not demonstrate either his knowledge of the concept or its acceptance by the Union army as doctrine. Grant was simply trying to accomplish a difficult task in the best manner his intellect and experience suggested. Similarly, the Union Army faced other challenges at the end of this campaign more important than codifying its success in doctrine. Still, the legacy of the Civil War experiences of the victorious Union Army and its leadership persisted in the U.S. Army for decades.

### **Section 3 - Post Civil War Campaigns, 1868-1877**

The post Civil War U.S. Army faced three major interrelated tasks: occupying the former Confederacy, defending its force structure from a Congress desperate for reduced military expenditures, and reestablishing its presence on the western frontier.<sup>18</sup> The first task diverted limited resources and provided ample ammunition for further economy-minded congressmen. The second task was more daunting, as the Army fought to retain at least its prewar establishment. Although initially successful in securing authorization for 54,000 men in 1866, three times its prewar strength, the Army saw its strength reduced to only 27,000 soldiers by 1874.<sup>19</sup> The third task was the most challenging due to the combination of the first two tasks and presidential

administrations at odds with the methods the military recommended for resolution of Indian problems.

When the Regular Army returned to frontier duty in 1865-1866, it faced the potential of war with restless Indian tribes from the Canadian to the Mexican borders, but did not have responsibility for daily administration of government affairs with the Indian tribes. Normal authority and responsibility resided with the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs, which operated the Indian reservations and territories and preferred to ask for military assistance only when the situation was beyond its control.<sup>20</sup> The resulting relationship between the Army and the Bureau was tenuous at best and the Army found its major campaigns reactive, rather than preemptive in nature. While the Peace Commission of 1867 and its implementing treaties neatly divided U.S. government responsibility for Indian issues by giving the Army the responsibility for Indians straying off Indian reservations and territories, this division only served to further exacerbate the tension and distrust between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Army, as the Army blamed the Bureau's incompetence for inciting most Indian depredations.<sup>21</sup>

Although the Army conducted many operations against Indian tribes from 1866 - 1900, most operations were brief and involved limited forces. Three operations were of sufficient size and duration to warrant study as military campaigns and possible examples of operational art. These include the Southern Plains War of 1868-1869, the Red River War of 1874-1875, and, the ultimate focus of this study, the Sioux War of 1876.

### The Southern Plains War of 1868-1869.

The Southern Plains War began with a series of Indian raids from the southern Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) into Kansas and Texas by Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and Commanche Indians during late 1867 and 1868. Division Commander Phil Sheridan, recently transferred west because of political objections concerning his lack of polish and strict application of Reconstruction Laws in Louisiana, and William T. Sherman, his Department Commander, settled on a campaign plan characterized by three factors: (1) the campaign would consist of converging infantry and cavalry columns; (2) the Indians and their resources would be attacked and destroyed whenever encountered, reminiscent of the scorched earth Civil War experiences of Sheridan and Sherman in the Shenandoah Valley and Georgia; and (3) the bulk of the campaign would be conducted in winter, when the army possessed a mobility and strength advantage.<sup>22</sup> Sheridan explained his logic in his Memoirs:

Realizing that their [the Indians] thorough subjugation would be a difficult task, I made up my mind to confine operations during the grazing and hunting seasons to protecting the people of the new settlements and on the overland routes, and then, when winter came, to fall upon the savages relentlessly, for in that season their ponies would be thin, and weak from food, and in the cold and snow, without strong ponies to transport their villages and plunder, their movements would be so much impeded that the troops could overtake them.<sup>23</sup>

Following a flurry of minor actions, Sheridan's forces commenced their campaign in mid-November 1868 against Indian camps in the Washita and Canadian River Valleys (see Map #2, Appendix A). Slightly more than 2000 government troops faced a similar number of Indian warriors.<sup>24</sup> One column of six cavalry troops and

two infantry companies attacked from the District of New Mexico eastward down the South Canadian River. A second column, composed of twelve cavalry troops, attacked southward from Fort Lyon, Colorado toward the Antelope Hills and the head of the Red River. The third column, the campaign main effort, attacked south from Camp Supply, Kansas toward the Washita River with eleven troops of cavalry and five infantry companies. Concerned that the operation must be energetically conducted, Sheridan personally commanded the expedition, traveling with the Camp Supply column.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the winter of 1868-1869 the three columns struck isolated Indian camps, forcing the Indians back onto the established reservations by the spring of 1869.

The results of this operation were less militarily decisive than Sheridan desired, as the Indians were free from further Army attack once on reservation soil. Although only one major battle was fought during this war, a dubious victory by Custer and the Seventh Cavalry on 27 November 1868 against a friendly Indian camp on the Washita River, Sheridan believe that this operation validated his strategy of attacking in winter with converging columns.

The military lessons from this campaign were complex. Robert Utley, the leading modern historian of the Frontier Army, proposes several lessons that the Army should have learned. First, the winter campaign did work, although the "... damage it wrought was less material than psychological."<sup>26</sup> Winter campaigns were costly for the Army, Utley continues, as they required significant logistics preparations and damaged the Army's precious livestock.<sup>27</sup> The costly nature of these campaigns was



acknowledged by Sheridan, who detailed the necessary logistics preparation in his

Memoirs:

To get ready for a winter campaign of six months gave us much to do. Thing most needed was men . . . It was necessary also to provide a large amount of transportation and accumulated quantities of stores, since the campaign would probably not end till spring.<sup>28</sup>

Still, Utley concludes, the success of Sheridan's winter campaign demonstrated that its benefits outweighed its costs and confirmed the utility of waging winter campaigns against the Plains Indians.<sup>29</sup> This was a lesson Sheridan and his subordinates also realized and would not soon forget.

Regardless of the difficulties of winter campaigning and the indecisive conclusion of the campaign, Sheridan's plans and the operations of his forces during the Southern Plains War of 1868-1869 demonstrated successful application of operational art. This operation clearly satisfies the basic definition of operational art presented in FM 100-5. The strategic goal for this campaign was simple: restore peace to the Southern Plains. Sheridan appreciated that the appropriate military end-state for this conflict was the elimination of armed Indian bands off the established reservations. To accomplish this objective, his plan utilized the tactical actions of converging columns to strike the Indian camps and drive them to the reservations.

Sheridan's 1868-1869 campaign also satisfies Schneider's conditions for operational art, further supporting the argument that operational art was present. The operations envisioned by Sheridan and conducted by his forces were distributed and part of greater distributed campaign. Sheridan's forces had relatively continuous

logistics, especially in comparison to his opponents during the winter, and were linked by command and control systems identical to those utilized by Grant: military telegraphs and couriers. The operationally durable formation of this operation was the regiment-sized mobile column, supported by field supply depots and wagon trains. In addition, Sheridan possessed a clear vision of how his campaign would be successfully conducted. The distributed employment of the separate columns of his command would ensure that his forces could strike the scattered Indian camps and destroy their resources, regardless of location. By traveling with the main effort column and actively involving himself with the actual conduct of operations, Sheridan ensured that this vision was properly implemented.<sup>30</sup> As a result of Sheridan's vision and simple, yet appropriate campaign plan, he achieved success and established a model for future operations against the Indians.

#### The Red River War of 1874-1875

The indecisive conclusion of the 1868-1869 war made the resurgence of subsequent conflicts with the Southern Plains Indians highly probable. Five years later, the Red River War of 1874-1875 began in response to resurgent Kiowa, Cheyenne, and Commanche depredations near the southern reservations. Recognizing the magnitude of the Indian threat and its inability to control the situation, the Indian Bureau acquiesced to Army requests to enter the reservation and resolve the situation. On 20 July 1874, Department Commander Sheridan received permission to initiate military operations.<sup>31</sup>

Sheridan's strategy for quelling the Red River insurrection paralleled his 1868-1869 strategy, except for the time of year. Sheridan again used converging columns, although without a single commander. Sheridan relied on two subordinate departmental commanders, Generals Augur and Pope, to supervise operations and coordinate their converging columns.<sup>32</sup> Augur, in turn, passed the conduct of the operations to his subordinate regimental commanders. In contrast, Pope's close supervision of his subordinate commanders was very unpopular.<sup>33</sup>

The plans for this campaign called for convergence of five columns toward the headwaters of the Washita river and the northern forks of the Red River, where approximately 1200 Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Commanche warriors were encamped (see Map #3, Appendix A).<sup>34</sup> Two columns from Pope's command would attack from the north and west. The first consisted of eight cavalry troops and four infantry companies, attacking southward toward the Washita River from Fort Dodge, Kansas. The second column from Pope's division consisted of four cavalry troops attacking from New Mexico eastward down the Canadian River. Augur's three columns moved from the south and east. One column of eight cavalry troops would attack north from Fort Concho, Texas; a second column would move to the northeast of the first; and Augur's third column would attack west from Fortt Sill in the Oklahoma Territory.

From the summer of 1874 into the winter of 1874-75 Sheridan's columns harassed the Indian parties, successfully driving them back toward the reservations. The summer weather, usually the Indian's ally, aided the soldiers, as severe drought scorched the prairie and dried up water holes.<sup>35</sup> As in the 1868-1869 campaign, the

Army fought no decisive battles during this campaign. Its victory was the culmination of numerous small actions against individual Indian bands. By early 1875, most Indians preferred the safety of reservations to the difficulty of survival off them.<sup>36</sup>

The lessons of this campaign were similar to those of the 1868-1869 campaign. Logistic support remained a paramount concern; throughout the campaign, columns were hampered by inadequate organic transportation and failures by government contractors to provide required services.<sup>37</sup> The harsh weather was extremely difficult on the soldiers and livestock, although they fared better than the Indians. Finally a new and potentially catastrophic lesson appeared, obvious to many junior leaders and modern historians, but apparently discounted by Sheridan.<sup>38</sup> Throughout this campaign, the lack of a single commander for the separate columns resulted in difficulties in coordinating the actions of the columns and numerous arguments over seniority and command authority.<sup>39</sup> This was a problem that would reoccur later with disastrous results.

Despite the many parallels between this campaign and the Southern Plains War of 1868-1869, the role of operational art in the Red River War is less obvious. While Sheridan's plans satisfy the definition of operational art, plan execution was limited by Sheridan's failures as a commander. As in the 1868-69 campaign, Sheridan determined how to best utilize the available military forces to restore peace on the Southern Plains. His plans and execution were similar to the 1868-69 campaign, with the exception that Sheridan did not accompany this expedition or serve as its commander, nor did he designate one of his subordinate commanders as expedition

commander. The result was difficulty in coordinating the operations of dispersed columns and dysfunctional debate over seniority when they converged. Despite this failure, Sheridan's vision of the campaign and the execution of his plan succeeded in achieving the desired military end-state. The validity of this model for successful Indian campaigns was reinforced, at least in Sheridan's mind.

### The Sioux-Cheyenne War of 1876

While Sheridan's forces were fighting the Southern Plains Indians, tensions were increasing with the Sioux Indians on the Northern Plains, inspired by U.S Government and Indian displeasure with the Peace Commission of 1867 and its implementing treaties. For the Sioux, the dominant Indian residents of the Northern Plains, their treaty with the U.S. government - the Treaty of 1868 - delineated a reservation including the present-day Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming. The Sioux also received hunting rights on an additional piece of ground, called the unceded territory, located west of the Black Hills, north of the North Platte River, and east of the summit of the Big Horn Mountains. According to the treaty, white settlers were not permitted in this area, nor could they pass through it without Sioux consent (see Appendix A, map #4). The treaty also included provisions for government rations at the Indian Agencies, Indian agreements to not commit hostile acts, and specified that the treaty could only be changed with a majority vote of the Sioux males.<sup>40</sup>

The results of this treaty were significant for the U.S. Army. Under the terms of the treaty, the Army abandoned the existing forts in the unceded territory. The

treaty also created controversy over the exact status of the unceded lands; it was unclear whether these lands were part of the reservation or a new type of territory. The Army's response in this situation was rapid and severe. Reasoning that the unceded lands were not part of the reservation, Sheridan affirmed the Army's authority over Indians off the reservations with a 29 July 1869 order stating that if Indians are "... outside the well defined limits of the reservation they are under the original and exclusive jurisdiction of the military authority; and as a rule will be considered hostile."<sup>41</sup> Despite this order, however, Sheridan was precluded from conducting military operations in the unceded territory except at the request of the Indian Bureau.

This treaty also had a major effect on the Sioux Indians.<sup>42</sup> Many Sioux resented the Treaty's creation of a reservation, disclaiming the government's authority to specify bounds to traditional Indian lands. As a result, the influence of the leading Sioux Chief who had agreed to the treaty, Red Cloud, began to decline, and many young Sioux warriors assumed increased leadership in tribal affairs. Among these new leaders were several who would play key roles in the Sioux War of 1876: Gall, Black Man, Crazy Horse, and Sitting Bull.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the treaty, it was apparent to the nation's leadership that conflict with the Sioux was inevitable. The primary inspiration for this conflict was the Black Hills, at once a Sioux holy land and an area coveted by the American public, convinced that the area held great agricultural and mineral wealth.<sup>44</sup> In 1874 a government expedition had traveled into the Black Hills for the explicit purpose of locating potential fort sites; the expedition also included two civilian prospectors. Although the only limited

amounts of minerals were discovered the public response was frantic. Hundreds of civilian miners violated the Sioux land. Military forces in the region were ordered to intercept and expel the unauthorized trespassers, and reluctantly they complied.<sup>45</sup>

Faced with public pressure supporting the miners, the Grant administration was in a quandary. The only legal method to acquire the Black Hills was purchase from the Sioux, an option rejected by the Sioux in 1875.<sup>46</sup> The administration had to find another way to obtain the Black Hills, or discover a method to convince the Indians to sell the disputed territory under the terms of the Treaty of 1868.

The official birth of the Sioux War of 1876 occurred at a 3 November 1876 meeting in Washington, DC, convened by President Grant and attended by Secretary of War Belknap, Secretary of Interior Chandler, Commissioner of Indian Affairs E.P. Smith, and Army Generals Sheridan and George Crook.<sup>47</sup> During this meeting, Grant agreed to authorize military actions against Sioux bands residing in the unceded territory, in the hope that actions against these bands would convince the reservation Sioux to support the sale of the Black Hills. Military operations against the off-reservation Indians were legal, Grant and the others reasoned, because the Treaty of 1868 did not authorize permanent Indian residence in the unceded territories. In addition, the Indian bands roaming these territories had conducted depredations against railroad survey parties and miners, civilian settlers, and peaceful Indian tribes, further justifying military action, the attendees argued.<sup>48</sup>

Sheridan immediately commenced planning for operations against the Sioux. Conferring with General Crook, Commander of the Department of the Platte, Sheridan

directed Crook to take no efforts to enforce orders forbidding the entrance of miners and prospectors into the Black Hills region. Similar orders were telegraphed to the Commander of the Department of the Dakota, General Alfred Terry.<sup>49</sup>

Sheridan's plans for operations against the Indians in the unceded territory were characteristically simple and direct: attack the winter encampments of the off-reservation Indians as soon as possible from several directions with existing Army forces in the area. Crook, operating from Fort Laramie, Wyoming, south of the area of operations, had cavalry and infantry regiments available. Terry could deploy primarily cavalry forces from Fort Abraham Lincoln, northeast of the Black Hills, and infantry forces from military forts in Montana, west of the potential area of operations. Both Crook and Terry were confident of their ability to strike the Indian bands and prepared to attack on Sheridan's orders.<sup>50</sup> In addition to his plans for a quick strike against the winter encampments, Sheridan reiterated his long-standing requests for construction of military forts along the Yellowstone River and Army control of the Indian Agencies.<sup>51</sup>

Before military operations could commence, however, the Grant Administration made a final effort to further legalize the planned operations. In December 1875 a letter was sent to the Agencies for delivery to the off-reservation Indian bands, ordering them to return to the reservations. The off-reservation bands were also told that if they did not return to the reservations by 31 January 1876, they would be considered hostile and the Army would attack. The Indian response to this notification, if it was even received, was varied. Most just ignored the document,



reasoning that they had the right to remain in the territories, regardless of what the government said.<sup>52</sup> The unanticipated military significance of the warning was threefold: military operations against the hostile bands were delayed by two months, the hostile bands were alerted to possible military actions, and the reservation Indians were warned that military actions were planned against their brethren, thus encouraging additional support for the off-reservation bands.

When the deadline passed with no movement of the hostile Sioux bands onto the reservations the Secretary of Interior referred the problem to the Secretary of War, stating " . . . the said Indians are hereby turned over to the War Department for such action on the part of the Army as you may deem proper under the circumstances."<sup>53</sup> The Secretary of Interior's letter was then referred to the General of the Army Sherman, who forwarded the issue to Sheridan on 7 February 1876.<sup>54</sup> Sheridan's 8 February orders to Crook directed him to commence operations against the hostile Sioux bands:

You are therefore ordered to take steps with the forces under your command as will carry out the wishes and orders above alluded to.

The lines and character of the operations of General Terry will be communicated to you as a means of information as soon as they are definitely determined upon.

All Department lines will be disregarded by the troops until the object requested by the Secretary of the Interior is attained.

I am of the belief that the operations under your directions and those under General Terry should be made without concert, but if you and he can come to any understanding about concerted movements, there will be no objection from me.<sup>55</sup>

Similar instructions were also transmitted to General Terry.

These minimal instructions were adequate given the available intelligence on the size and location of the Indian Bands.<sup>56</sup> The operations directed by these instructions, however, quickly unraveled. A combination of bad weather and updated intelligence indicating that the Indian bands were 200 miles further west than anticipated negated Terry's chances for a rapid strike, and he postponed operations until the weather improved.<sup>57</sup> Crook also found that the unusually severe winter weather delayed his preparations, and he was unable to commence operations before 1 March. Crook's plan, once he had consolidated portions of the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Regiments at Fort Fetterman, Wyoming, was to

. . . move, during the inclement season, by forced marches, carrying by pack-animals the most meager supplies [and] secretly and expeditiously surprise the hostile bands, and if possible, chastise them before spring fairly opened, and they could receive, as they always do in summer, re-enforcements from reservations; the number of hostiles being largely augmented in summer, while in winter the number is comparatively small.<sup>58</sup>

Crook's forces slowly moved north, battered by a severe winter storm. On 17 March, the column attacked an Indian village of 100 lodges beside the Powder river. Although the attack was initially successful, the Indian warriors counterattacked, driving Crook's forces from the village and recaptured their pony herd. Crook, enraged by the poor battlefield performance of the commander of troops, Colonel John Reynolds, and frustrated by the weather, returned to Fort Fetterman.<sup>59</sup>

Crook and Terry waited out the winter at Forts Fetterman and Abraham Lincoln, recommencing offensive operations in May 1876.<sup>60</sup> Sheridan's campaign strategy now closely resembled the converging column concept successfully utilized

in previous campaigns. Terry's expedition, consisting of the entire 7th Cavalry Regiment, three infantry companies, and forty Arikara Indian scouts, departed Fort Abraham Lincoln on 17 May, heading west toward the Yellowstone River.<sup>61</sup> Crook departed Fort Fetterman on 29 March with fifteen troops of cavalry and three infantry companies, moved northward along the Bozeman trail, and established a supply base at Goose Creek, Wyoming on 14 June.<sup>62</sup> The third converging column, Colonel John Gibbon's Montana column of six infantry companies and four cavalry troops, had departed Fort Ellis, Montana on 30 March, and was now patrolling the northern banks of the Yellowstone, under Terry's command.<sup>63</sup> The total strength of the three columns was approximately 2500 soldiers.<sup>64</sup>

As Crook and Terry's columns approached, the number of Indians in the unceded territory swelled to over 2000 lodges by June.<sup>65</sup> The reasons for this increase included the Sioux Indians' traditional summer migration to their hunting grounds, increasingly poor conditions at the reservations, and the government's heavy-handed attempt to force sale of the Black Hills.<sup>66</sup> Although the traditional summer migration was known to Sheridan and his subordinates, they downplayed its significance. Sheridan believed that either Terry or Crook could handle the Indians, if only the Indians would stay together and were willing to fight, as he explained in a 16 May telegram to Terry:

I will hurry up Crook, but you must rely on the ability of your own column for your success. I believe it to be fully equal to all the Sioux which can be brought against it, and only hope they will hold fast to meet it. Keep me as well posted as you can, and depend upon my full assistance in every respect. You know the

impossibility of any large number of Indians keeping together as a hostile body for even one week.<sup>67</sup>

Unfortunately for Crook and Terry, the Sioux Indians could stay together and were willing to stand and fight during the summer of 1876. Although the Indians normally avoided a fight if the odds were not overwhelmingly in their favor, the situation was different in June 1876. The Sioux now had superiority in numbers and were motivated by a general appreciation that the government threat in 1876 was extinction, not merely defeat. Buoyed by superior numbers and sustained by spiritual fervor and visions of victory, the Sioux believed that success was preordained and thus sought combat, rather than avoiding it.<sup>68</sup>

Crook learned this lesson on 17 June at Rosebud Creek, when his column was attacked by a large concentration of Sioux warriors. Although Crook was left in possession of the battlefield after six hours of hard fighting and claimed a victory, in reality the Sioux had delivered a major blow to Crook's forces. More importantly, the success of the Sioux attack destroyed Crook's vision of how he could defeat the Indians. Chastened, Crook returned to his Goose Creek supply base and did not transmit the results of his engagement to Sheridan until 19 June.<sup>69</sup>

Unaware of Crook's 17 June battle, Terry conferred with his subordinates on 21 June at the junction of the Yellowstone River and Rosebud Creek. Based on reports from the expedition's Crow Indian scouts, the Sioux camp was correctly determined to be on the Little Big Horn River. Custer was directed to move south up the Rosebud with the entire 7th Cavalry Regiment and then move down the Little Big Horn from the south, while Gibbon would enter the Little Big Horn Valley from the

north. Gibbon believed he would be in position at the mouth of the Little Big Horn River by 26 June.<sup>70</sup> While either column was believed strong enough to defeat the Sioux, most contemporary accounts indicate that the plan was for Gibbon's force to block the northward movement of the Indians, while Custer's force "would strike the blow", as his cavalry regiment was more mobile and stronger than Gibbon's column.<sup>71</sup>

On 25 June, Custer's scouts identified a large Indian village in the Little Big Horn River valley. Concerned that his forces were already compromised, but unaware of the Indian village's size or Crook's defeat a week earlier, Custer decided to divert from Terry's 21 June plan.<sup>72</sup> Rather than continuing further south on the Rosebud or waiting for the arrival of the other columns, Custer decided to attack the Indian village. Consciously deciding to not accomplish a detailed reconnaissance, Custer ordered his forces forward. Dividing his regiment into three battalions, Custer ordered Major Reno to enter the Little Big Horn Valley with his battalion and attack the village from the south, while Custer would conduct a battalion-size attack from the east. Captain Benteen would follow with the third battalion and the regiment's supply trains.

The attack of Reno's battalion was quickly blunted by Indian counterattacks and Reno retreated to the bluffs east of the Little Big Horn River, where Benteen and his battalion eventually joined Reno's defense. Unaware of Reno's difficulties, Custer moved north along the Little Big Horn River bluffs and attacked the center of the Indian village. Surprised by the ferocious defense by the village's defenders, Custer's battalion retreated to the bluffs east the Little Big Horn River, where they were quickly annihilated by the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, vastly superior in numbers and

firepower to the cavalrymen. Reno and Benteen continued their defense until the Indian village moved and Gibbon and Terry's forces arrived on 27 June. The tragic results of Custer's attack of the Sioux village, perhaps the most-studied tactical action in American military of history, are well-known today: one-half of the Seventh Cavalry regiment were killed or wounded; the entire battalion under Custer's personal command was annihilated.<sup>73</sup>

Stunned by their defeats, Crook's and Terry's commands buried their dead and awaited further instructions and reinforcements. Congress and the public rallied behind the Army and Sheridan's earlier requests were fulfilled. Congress appropriated funds to construct the Yellowstone River forts that Sheridan had repeatedly requested and lifted limitations on the Army strength, allowing the enlistment of 2500 additional cavalrymen. Similarly, the Secretary of Interior agreed to allow Army control of the Sioux Indian Agencies. In addition, reinforcements were rushed into area. Throwing away any pretense of legally acquiring the Black Hills, Congress halted all subsistence appropriations for the Sioux Agencies until the Sioux relinquished their claims for the unceded territory and the Black Hills.<sup>74</sup>

Following the Sioux Indian village's trail, Crook and Terry met on 10 August on the Rosebud and decided to temporarily combine their forces, as suggested by Sheridan.<sup>75</sup> After several weeks, they parted ways, realizing that their ponderous combined column had limited prospects of finding the Indians. Terry then established a temporary fort in the Yellowstone Valley, manned with Colonel Nelson Miles' Fifth

Infantry Regiment, and disbanded his expedition. Crook decided to follow a fresh trail into the Black Hills, commencing the infamous "Horsemeat March" on 5 September.<sup>76</sup>

While Crook and Terry were awaiting reinforcements, the Sioux camp moved out of the Little Big Horn River valley and started to break up and scatter. As a result, the remainder of the campaign consisted only of minor battles as Miles' forces and Crook's subsequent winter expedition discovered and harassed dispersed bands of Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. Throughout the winter and into the spring of 1877 the various Sioux tribes and their allies slowly returned to the agencies, where they discovered that the Army controlled the agencies and the U.S. Government owned the Black Hills and the unceded territory. Following the Custer Massacre, a new Black Hills Commission had visited the Sioux Agencies and accepted the signatures of the few confused chiefs present as sufficient to approve a new agreement relinquishing Sioux rights to the Black Hills and the unceded territories, in exchange for the creation of a newly defined Great Sioux Reservation and continued government subsistence. In other words, Grant's Black Hills quandary was resolved, not by the military victory of Sheridan's forces, but rather by their defeat.

#### **Section 4 - The Sioux War of 1876: Failure and Success**

While many authors have attempted to explain and analyze the tactical defeat of Custer's forces, analyses at the operational level are rare, and tend to focus on government conspiracy theories and individual personalities, rather than the overall

design and execution of Sheridan's plan of operations. This study will first analyze this aspect of the Sioux War of 1876 by utilizing portions of Cohen and Gooch's failure matrix methodology. This methodology was selected because it provides a structured analytical methodology for the analysis of military failure. This methodology assists in the identification of failures, determination of critical tasks that led to failure, shows relationships between levels of command and their contribution toward misfortune, and highlights possible ways that failures can be corrected or avoided.

Cohen and Gooch propose the existence of three types of military failure: failures to learn, anticipate, and adapt. Failure to learn is defined as "failure to absorb readily accessible lessons from recent history," while failure to anticipate is an "... inability to foresee and take appropriate measures."<sup>78</sup> The final type of failure, failure to adapt, is an "... inability to cope with unfolding events."<sup>79</sup> When two types of failure are present, usually learning and anticipatory failures, according to Cohen and Gooch, aggregate failure occurs. This type of failure is not necessarily mortal, they continue, since failures can be redeemed by successful adaptation. The presence of all three types of failure, however, usually results in catastrophic failure, with recovery only possible with outside assistance or regeneration of the organization's ability to adapt.<sup>80</sup>

The Sioux War of 1876 demonstrates many examples of failure to learn. The most significant failure to learn was Sheridan's failure to appreciate the difficulties caused in the 1875-1875 Red River War by his failure to designate a single field



commander. This failure was manifested by his subsequent failure to designate a single field commander in 1876. There are several possible explanations for Sheridan's failure. Foremost was the ultimate success of the 1874-75 operation. Sheridan also wished to avoid any administrative or political difficulties that might be caused by combining the operations of two departments under a single commander.<sup>81</sup> An additional concern was who to place in charge of the operation. While Terry and Crook were capable department commanders, Sheridan did not wish to place either of them in charge of the operation, although Sherman thought Crook was capable of the command.<sup>82</sup> Terry, the senior department commander, lacked personal experience commanding combat operations against Indians, preferring to leave such operations to subordinates.<sup>83</sup> Despite Crook's acknowledged talents as an Indian fighter, placing him in charge of the operation was also unlikely because of his eccentric personality and well-known dislike for Terry.<sup>84</sup> Sheridan's only alternative was to command the expedition himself, but political and personal pressures made this alternative highly unlikely in 1876. Many political distractions occupied Sheridan: the potential for unrest before the election of 1876 demanded his personal attention, as did the nation's celebration of its centennial.<sup>85</sup> In addition, Sheridan in 1876 was not Sheridan in 1868 - he had recently married and gained considerable weight living the comfortable life of his Chicago headquarters; the rigors of a prolonged field campaign were probably no longer appealing to the aging cavalryman.<sup>86</sup>

Sheridan's other great failure to learn in this campaign was his continued discounting of reports of increased number of Sioux in the unceded territory. This

failure was partially rooted in the racism of the era: it was immaterial how many Indians left the reservation, as they were only Indians. Sheridan also discounted the increased numbers as he felt it impossible for large numbers of Indians to remain together ". . . for even one week."<sup>87</sup> Sheridan and his subordinates did know that many reservation Indians routinely moved to their traditional hunting grounds during the summer. In addition, Indian agents reported that the annual exodus was unusually large, as did Lieutenant Colonel Wesley Merritt, who personally inspected several agencies at Sheridan's request. Crook also reported that more Indians than usual were leaving the Agencies, to no avail.<sup>88</sup>

Sheridan and his subordinates also committed several failures to anticipate. For example, Sheridan, Terry, and Crook all failed to appreciate the secondary effects of the winter warning to the hostile bands. While Sheridan himself thought the off-reservation bands would find the warning a "good joke," it actually served to inspire increased numbers of Indians to depart the reservations, demonstrated the depth of the government's intentions, and provided a general alert of the Army's winter raid plans to the non-reservation Indians.<sup>89</sup>

The Army's other key failure to anticipate was its unwillingness to consider the possibility that the Indians might actually stay together and fight when large military columns approached, rather than fleeing as usual. This failure was substantiated by the Army's previous experiences on the western frontier, as explained by noted Sioux War historian, John S. Gray: "The real marvel is that so large a village could have remained together long enough to be ready at the critical moment. It remained intact

only briefly, but fate timed the encounter perfectly for the Indian."<sup>90</sup> The effect of this failure was magnified by the Army's arrogance that it could handle the Indians, regardless of their numbers, with any one of its three major columns. This arrogance is demonstrated by Sheridan's 16 May 1876 directions to Terry, in response to Terry's estimate that he now faced 1500 Indian lodges:

I will hurry up Crook, but you must rely on the ability of your own column for you best success. I believe it to be fully equal to all the Sioux which can be brought against it, and only hope they will hold fast to meet it.<sup>91</sup>

There are also examples in this campaign of the third type of military failure, failure to adapt. One example was Sheridan's lack of response to the initial winter failures of the campaign. Instead of changing his plan of operations, Sheridan retained the converging column concept and continued to rely on his subordinates to coordinate their actions, despite the growing numbers of Indians in the unceded territory and their demonstrated willingness to fight. This failure may have occurred because Sheridan and Crook blamed Reynolds for the Powder River defeat, rather than realizing that fundamental change was occurring in how the Sioux Indians fought.<sup>92</sup>

Crook's inability to respond to differences in Sioux organization and tactics, compared to his experiences with the Apaches in Arizona, is a further example of the failure to adapt. Crook succeeded in Arizona by adopting guerrilla tactics and traveling with minimal logistic support. These tactics failed against the more numerous Sioux, who fought conventionally in 1876.<sup>93</sup> A final example of the failure to adapt was the inability and unwillingness of Crook and Terry to coordinate either their initial summer campaign efforts or their post Little Big Horn operations. The blame for this

last failure rests both with Sheridan and Crook: Sheridan failed to initially require coordination or more than courtesy communications between the two department commanders, with communications relayed through Sheridan's headquarters, rather than directly between Crook and Terry.<sup>94</sup> Crook, similarly, had no desire to work with or even to communicate with Terry, who was, in contrast, quite willing to ask for and accept advice.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the presence of all three types of failure, the Army salvaged victory from this campaign and achieve its desired end-state: subjugation of the off-reservation Sioux. This victory occurred because of the general correctness of Sheridan's preferred military strategy of December of 1876. Sheridan's preferred strategy had three components: place the Agencies under military control, construct military posts in the unceded territories, and rapidly strike the off-reservation bands. This strategy was designed to alleviate the conditions that encouraged the Indians to depart the reservations, deter their occupation of the unceded territories with a strong military presence, and severely punish the Indians currently residing off-reservation. Unfortunately for Sheridan, while the Grant administration was willing to break its treaty with the Sioux by approving military attacks against the off-reservation Sioux, it was not willing to throw away all of its "Peace Policy" and gave up civilian control of the Agencies, nor was it willing quite yet to flagrantly violate the Treaty of 1868 by placing permanent installations in the unceded territory. Sheridan was left with a single option: attack the winter camps and hope that this action was sufficient both to

punish the off-reservation Sioux and convince the reservation Sioux to accede to government requests for the Black Hills.

The June 1876 defeats of Crook and Custer galvanized public and political will in support of the Army and made Sheridan's preferred strategy plan possible. The response by Congress was rapid: funds for the construction of two forts in the Yellowstone Valley were approved, the Army's strength ceiling was lifted, and the Army was permitted to take control of the Sioux agencies.<sup>96</sup> Both Crook and Terry received significant numbers of reinforcements.<sup>97</sup> At this point, the Indian's eventual defeat was inevitable. In terms of Cohen and Gooch's methodology, the Army was able to recover from its failures both because it received outside assistance - additional forces - and was permitted to adapt its strategy to conform more completely with Sheridan's preferred strategy.

Two other factors account for the ultimate success of the Army in this campaign. First, the defeats of Custer and Crook prompted Sheridan to increase his personal involvement in the campaign. He sent a personal representative to evaluate the situation and confer with Crook and Terry, attempted to restore their confidence, and encouraged them to reinitiate offensive action.<sup>98</sup> Although he stopped short of appointing an overall field commander or personally assuming that role, Sheridan encouraged further coordination and cooperation between Crook and Terry and directed improved communications both between the columns and with his headquarters.<sup>99</sup> Realizing that the forts funded by Congress could not be constructed

before the approaching winter, he also directed the establishment of temporary encampments in the Yellowstone Valley.<sup>100</sup>

Another factor in the Army's victory is Sheridan's final discovery of a subordinate commander capable of meeting the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors on their own terms: Colonel Nelson Miles. During the winter of 1876-1877, Miles and his regiment, based in temporary encampments on the Yellowstone River, energetically sought and harassed the Indian bands remaining in the unceded territory. Miles, reflecting a vanity as renowned as his abilities as a commander and Indian fighter, proudly described the reasons for his success in a letter to Sherman:

Enough has been done to demonstrate what can be accomplished by a perfect spy system, a properly organized command, and such energy and management used as enables to find, follow, and defeat large bodies of the Indians every time and under all circumstances.<sup>101</sup>

The eventual defeat of the Sioux Indians in the unceded territory was inevitable, regardless of the Army's actions. In the short term, the great Sioux village of the Little Big Horn had a finite life, and quickly broke apart after the defeat of Custer, driven as much by a belief that the vision of the soldiers' defeat had been accomplished as by the difficulty of sustaining such a large concentration of Indians and the approach of Terry and Gibbon's columns.<sup>102</sup> Even a complete Indian victory in this campaign would have only slightly delayed the continued westward expansion of the United States. With the demise of the primary source of subsistence for the Plains Indians, the vast herds of plains buffalo, the Sioux would shortly have no alternative but to live off the government dole on the hated reservations.<sup>103</sup>

## **Section 5 - Operational Art and the Sioux War of 1876**

Operational art was a key factor in the design of Sheridan's initial plans and the Army's final victory over the Sioux Indians. In addition, flaws in its application help explain the initial failures of the campaign in the winter of 1876 and the June 1876 defeats of Crook and Custer. Sheridan, of course, was not personally cognizant of this modern term or its application to campaign design and execution. However, just as Grant was not familiar with the terms of operational art in 1864 and 1865, yet planned and conducted operations against the Confederacy demonstrating the value of its tenets, so too did Sheridan utilize operational art in his 1876 campaign against the Sioux Indians and their allies.

Using the terminology of the doctrinal definition of operational art, Sheridan appreciated that President Grant's strategic objective was government control of the Black Hills. In turn, the military end-state that Sheridan's forces had to accomplish to satisfy the strategic objective was establishment of peaceful conditions in the unceded territory through the defeat of the non-reservation Sioux. This defeat had to be so decisive that it would encourage the acquiescence of the reservation Sioux to the government's demands. The means available to Sheridan were the military forces in the vicinity of the Sioux reservation and the unceded territory, while his preferred method for accomplishing this end-state was winter attack by converging columns.

Evaluation of Sheridan's initial campaign plan against the requirements for operational art contained in FM 100-5 is also favorable. Sheridan had a broad vision

of what it would take to defeat the Indians. Sheridan understood that the base causes of Indian unhappiness at the Agencies - primarily the lack of adequate rations - must be addressed, which, in his mind, could only occur with military control. Similarly, Sheridan anticipated the difficulty of attacking the Indian camps in the winter and understood the number of forces required to accomplish the task; he did, however, fail to anticipate the magnitude and temperament of the summer migration off the Agencies, the logical result of the failure of the Army's winter campaign against the Sioux.

Despite the aforementioned failure to anticipate, Sheridan did understand the relationship of ends to means and was convinced that he had adequate forces to accomplish the assigned task. The last requirement for operational art, effective joint and combined cooperation, was also satisfied by this campaign. Sheridan's forces utilized Indian scouts and auxiliaries, although more by subordinate initiative than by Sheridan's directives or plans. In addition, Sheridan's forces relied substantially on riverborne logistics support throughout the campaign.

This campaign also satisfies the various components of operational art presented by Schneider. The operations of Sheridan's converging columns were naturally distributed operations, although this was as much a function of their pre-campaign garrison locations as it was conscious design. Sheridan's plan of operations envisioned a distributed campaign. Sheridan did not expect a single decisive battle against the Indians; rather he anticipated numerous small fights by any one of the separate columns, wherever they discovered the Indians.



Continuous logistics, another of Schneider's components, had a key role in Sheridan's operations. Prior to the initiation of the campaign, Sheridan and his subordinates ensured that they were ready for a long campaign, stockpiling supplies at forts and establishing field depots. In addition, commercial wagon trains and military mule trains were obtained and utilized to maintain adequate logistic support.

One damning aspect of Sheridan's operations is his poor command system, a function of his subordinates' personalities and Sheridan's inadequate guidance more than a function of limitations with existing communications technologies. Standard telegraph service was available to all the permanent forts in the theater, supplemented with couriers and river steamers, permitting command and control at least as instantaneous as that supporting Grant in 1864-65. Sheridan's ability to utilize this system was limited, however, by his physical absence from the theater of operations for most of the campaign.

The next component presented by Schneider is operationally durable formations, organizations capable of conducting deep, independent, distributed operations. While the operationally durable organization of the Civil War was the field army, the regimental column was the operationally durable formation of this conflict. An infantry or cavalry regiment was large enough to handle any postulated Indian threat, while possessing the mobility and flexibility necessary to react to changes in Indian dispositions. Any larger unit was potentially too ponderous and difficult to control, as Crook and Terry learned when they combined their forces following the Little Big Horn fight.

Sheridan's greatest weakness with respect to operational art was his lack of adequate operational vision, the ability to visualize the overall conduct of a campaign and adjust plans throughout the operation according to enemy actions. Sheridan did have a good grasp of what was necessary to defeat the Indians and accomplish the desired end-state. He did not possess the ability to anticipate changes in Indian numbers and strategy, with the result that he failed to adequately adjust his plan, leading to midsummer catastrophe. Sheridan did eventually realize his error and, aided by a suddenly supportive Congress, modified his plan of operations and eventually achieved success.

One of the reasons that Sheridan's plan of operations was so simple and nondirective was his realization that he was fighting a foe, who was, except in winter, more mobile and more individually skilled than his forces. The Indians were inherently a distributed enemy, thus requiring the distributed deployment of Sheridan's forces. In normal situations, Sheridan's best hope of finding the Indians and defeating them was by attacking with multiple independent columns, each capable of defeating any Indians it might discover.

Another aspect of operational art, the campaign planning practiced by Sheridan and his subordinates during the Sioux War of 1876, was simple and basic, especially when compared to modern military decision making and campaign planning. It was reasonable for Sheridan to assume that previously successful patterns for operations would once again be successful, given the Army's experiences with the Indians. In addition, the existing deployment of units and the limited campaign season further

reinforced Sheridan's converging column concept. Sheridan and his subordinates did attempt to determine the general locations and intentions of the non-reservation bands prior to the initiation of hostilities, but were they limited by a lack of familiarity with the area of operations, due to the Army's compliance with the provisions of the Treaty of 1868, and generally poor tactical reconnaissance throughout the conduct of the campaign. In addition, the designated commanders and forces did accomplish logistic preparations in anticipation of campaign requirements.

Sheridan's simple plans also fare well when evaluated against planning fundamentals from FM 100-5. Sheridan understood his mission, as did his immediate subordinates. Sheridan' commander's intent was flawed, however, with respect to communication and cooperation between Crook and Terry. Basic logistics and intelligence estimates were accomplished prior to the campaign. Finally, Sheridan's subordinates understood the basic concept of operations for this campaign.

The modern concepts of operational design discussed in FM 100-5 were unknown in Sheridan's day, but his plan shows an implicit appreciation for these concepts. The center of gravity for the Sioux Indians was their resources and temporary spiritual unity. While Sheridan had no knowledge of the latter, nor could he have reasonably attacked it, he understood the importance of avoiding conflict by providing adequate supplies at the Agencies and discouraging Agency departures by occupying the preferred hunting grounds with military forces. The center of gravity for Sheridan's forces was the general coordination and communication between each of the three converging columns. While Sheridan understood that the operations of the

converging columns should be coordinated, he also realized the great difficulty of actually coordinating operations, given the vast area, lack of information on the exact location of the Indians, and limited communications means. At the very least, Sheridan should have specified periodic contact between the columns and his headquarters, as well as demanded frequent transmission of each column's anticipated concepts of operation. By failing to provide more specific instructions to his subordinates about coordination and minimum necessary communications, Sheridan failed to protect his center of gravity and contributed directly to Custer's defeat at the Little Big Horn.

Lines of operations was probably a more familiar term to Sheridan and his subordinates, who appreciated the importance of establishing and maintaining lines of communications with their respective logistic bases. The challenge of fighting the Indians was, of course, their lack of any true lines of operations as they did not require logistic bases or supply lines for survival. Decisive points were probably also familiar to Sheridan and his commanders, although are less readily apparent in this campaign than lines of operations. For the Army, decisive points for this operation were likely Indian camp sites, potential hunting grounds, routes from the Agencies, and locations of fording sites at the major rivers and creeks in the area of operations. Sheridan's desire to control the Agencies and occupy the Sioux hunting grounds demonstrates his understanding of the concept of decisive points; unfortunately, political decisions and the limited number of forces initially precluded Sheridan's desire to control these points.

Sheridan and his subordinates were all familiar with the idea of culmination, if not the term. They all knew that their columns had a finite life, since the Army, unlike the Indians, did not live off the land. The paradox that tactical commanders had to wrestle with was how large a supply train to pull behind the regimental column; the lighter the supply load, the faster the unit could move, but the sooner it would culminate. The scattering of the Indian village after the Little Big Horn encampment is a demonstration of culmination in action - the village was so large that it could no longer obtain sufficient local game, so its breakup and scattering was necessary for survival. In many ways, the Sioux were victims of their own success: the more they won, the larger the camp became. In turn, the larger the camp became, the shorter its life and unity.

#### **Section 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations**

When the role of operational art in the history of the United States Army is discussed, the chronology usually skips directly from Grant's 1864-1865 campaign to American military operations in World War II.<sup>104</sup> This eighty year leap is unfortunate, however, because it ignores three campaigns which demonstrate the successful application of operational art, despite the absence of the massive conventional armies and foes that characterized the Civil War and World War II. In the first of these campaigns, the Southern Plains War of 1868-69, the Frontier Army's campaign was designed and conducted in accordance with the tenets of operational art, contributing to the Army's success in driving marauding Indian bands back to government

reservations. Paralleling the design of the 1868-1869 campaign while exceeding its success, the operations of the Army in the Red River War of 1874-75 eliminated the threat of major future conflict with the Southern Plains Indians. The final campaign, the Sioux War of 1876, demonstrates operational art in Sheridan's preferred campaign strategy and in the final strategy adopted after the Army's unsuccessful winter and summer campaigns of 1876, while the Army's disastrous initial defeats during this campaign are linked to the previous campaign's command system problems. Ignorant of the impact in the Red River War of his failure to designate a single field commander, Sheridan committed the same error in 1876, contributing directly to Sioux victories over Crook and Custer in June 1876.

Identifying operational art in these campaigns is important because it demonstrates that this modern concept can be applied to analysis of nontraditional historical conflicts and conflicts involving relatively small forces. In addition, the success of the Army in the first two campaigns demonstrates that operational art has a legitimate role in the design of military campaigns against unconventional foes, like the Indians of the Southern Plains. In contrast, the third campaign confirms the continued validity of operational art in the opposite situation - conflicts with a conventional enemy - as the Sioux in 1876 fought with essentially conventional weapons and tactics.

Despite the successful conclusion of these three campaigns, problems in execution highlight that operational art is not merely application of previously successful operational plans. In all three campaigns, rigid application of previously

successful campaign models, without serious consideration of any alternatives, was potentially disastrous. The lesson from these campaigns is that operational art involves deliberate analysis of a situation and determination of the most effective and appropriate way to utilize available forces to accomplish the assigned mission. Previously successful operations may provide examples for the development of possible courses of action, but should not be selected unless analysis reveals their superiority.

These three campaigns also provide several important lessons for modern military campaign planners. First, these campaigns all highlight the preeminent role of the commander in designing and executing a military campaign. A campaign will probably fail or at best come to a less than optimal conclusion if a commander's vision is lacking, seriously flawed, overly rigid, or poorly transmitted to his subordinates. While Sheridan in 1876 was clearly not an "operational genius" like Grant in 1864, he did have a good initial vision of the steps needed to defeat the Sioux; the flaw was in execution and transmission of this vision.

Of equal importance is the realization that the successful application of operational art to campaign design and execution does not by itself guarantee victory. Sometimes political reality will deny utilization of the best course of action, as occurred to Sheridan prior to the initiation of the 1876 campaign when he was denied control of the Agencies and permission to construct forts in the Yellowstone Valley. In addition, an enemy may be destined to win, regardless of friendly application of operational art. As Crook and Custer discovered in June 1876, if the foe possesses

superiority in numbers, firepower, strategy, tactics, or will, defeat may be unavoidable.

Indeed, some historians believe that the Sioux would have prevailed even if faced in June 1876 with the combined forces of Terry, Crook, and Gibbon.<sup>105</sup> Utley explains this evaluation:

Never before or after were the northern Plains tribes better prepared for war. They were numerous, united, confident, superbly led, emotionally charged to defend their homeland and freedom, and able, through design or good fortune, to catch their adversary in unfavorable tactical situations. Even flawless generalship might not have prevailed over Sitting Bull's mighty coalition that summer. In large part the generals lost the war because the Indians won it.<sup>106</sup>

If operational art does not guarantee victory, the counter is also true: military victory does not require operational art. It is difficult to credit Indian application of operational art as an explanation for their victories at Rosebud Creek and the Little Big Horn River. Application of operational art does provide a way to increase the probability or extent of victory.

Finally, the conduct of the Frontier Army's operations against the Indians of the Southern and Northern Plains verifies that an operations plan is just a possible way to conduct a future operation. As the Army learned in the Sioux War of 1876, no matter how good or complete a plan is, how well it worked before, or whether it demonstrates operational art, the true test of a plan is in its execution.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This war is known by a variety of names, to include the Sioux or Sioux - Cheyenne War of 1876 and the Centennial Campaign of 1876.

<sup>2</sup>Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War (NY: The Free Press, 1990). For an explanation of this methodology, see below, pp. 27-28.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Army, FM 100-5, Operations (Final Draft) (Ft Monroe, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 19 January 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 5-2.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 5-3.

<sup>6</sup>James J. Schneider, "Theoretical Paper No. 4, Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Emergence of Operational Art" (Ft Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 16 June 1991).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 30.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>FM 100-5, 7-7 - 7-14. The first two fundamentals, mission and commander's intent, address what is to be accomplished in a campaign and why is it to be accomplished. The inclusion of estimates as the next fundamental of effective planning highlights the importance of continuously assessing the friendly and enemy situation for the development of possible military operations and modification of plans.

Proper accomplishment of estimates is crucial to accomplishment of the next planning fundamental: the concept of operations. This fundamental addresses the third key question of military planning - how - and describes how an operation proceeds to accomplish the specified missions.

FM 100-5 's next two planning fundamentals - concepts of operational design and sequencing operations - directly assist operational commanders and campaign planners in the application of operational art. Through the identification of the friendly and enemy center of gravity, "... the hub of all power and movement upon which everything depends," according to FM 100-5, campaign planners design operations that mass effects against the enemy center of gravity, while protecting the friendly center of gravity. Once centers of gravity have been identified, campaign planners consider friendly and enemy lines of operations, a military force's spatial and temporal orientation with relation to the enemy. Interior lines of operations allow a weaker force to move rapidly and concentrate against a stronger enemy, while exterior lines of operations require larger forces, but support convergence of these forces to achieve

annihilation of a weaker opponent. The second concept of operational design, decisive points, refers to locations, usually geographic in nature, which provide a distinct advantage over the enemy and greatly influence an action's outcome. The final concept of operational design, culmination, refers to the spatial or temporal point when the combat power advantage of an attacker or defender disappears; campaign plans must consider and anticipate both friendly and enemy culmination.

The next fundamental of planning, sequencing operations, reflects a direct application of operational art as explained by Schneider. Campaign commanders and planners must consciously sequence military operations to accomplish the assigned mission, especially given the complexity of deploying, organizing, and supporting large modern military forces. Several key tools that planners utilize to sequence operations are phases, branches, and sequels. Phases, specific periods of time in an operation where forces are engaged in similar activities, allow commanders to logically structure operations and facilitate shifting emphasis and forces as phases change. Similarly, branches and sequels apply the concept of phasing to possible contingencies and subsequent operations, respectively.

The next planning fundamental presented in FM 100-5, deception, refers to the conscious effort by planners to include measures in a plan that deliberately the enemy as to where and how an operation will be conducted. FM 100-5's final planning fundamental is rehearsals, "the process of practicing a plan or order that has been issued in the time available before actual execution against an opposing force." Rehearsals increase subordinate familiarity with a planned operation, improving the probability of successful plan execution, and may identify major plan faults.

<sup>10</sup> Schneider, 43-44.

<sup>11</sup> Schneider, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 62-63. A complimentary argument for the realization of operational art in Grant's 1864-1865 campaign is offered by Lieutenant Colonel James M. Dubik in "Grant's Final campaign: A Study of Operational Art" (Ft Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, undated). Dubik contends that the success of Grant's 1864-1865 campaign was due to at least four contributing components. The first component, an intellectual component, encompasses Grant's ability to take the strategic

aim presented by President Lincoln, determine an appropriate military end-state, and then develop operational objectives correctly linked to the military end-state. The next component, a psychological-physical component, addresses the means available to execute Grant's plan. Dubik argues that Grant had the necessary means: sufficient numbers of proficient leaders and forces, theaters of operations with adequate space and infrastructure, and the political support of the government and the people.

Dubik's third characteristic of operational art, a cybernetic component, relates to the operational commander's ability to command and direct the temporal and spatial distribution of battles and operations within a campaign. Grant could accomplish this task, Dubik explains, because of his effective personal command system, which included telegraph messages, personal letters, and staff and personal visits.

The final component presented by Dubik, a harmonic component, is the result of the successful combination of the first three components. When this component is present, Dubik explains,

...the plan developed is good and can be executed by the forces and leaders and within the space and infrastructure available, using the command system the commander has developed. If these three components are not in harmony, then the commander has four choices: he can adjust his plan, adjust his means, adjust his command system, or ask that his aim be adjusted.

<sup>18</sup> Russell F. Weigley. History of the United States Army (NY: MacMillan, 1973) 265-267.

<sup>19</sup> Robert M. Utley, Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1890 (NY: MacMillan, 1973) 13-16. Utley's account of the Army on the western frontier is considered the classic military history of this period. A brief history of this period is included in Weigley's History of the United States Army. Paul Andrew Hutton's Phil Sheridan and His Army (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985) focuses on this period through the perspective of the General Phil Sheridan, commander of the Frontier Army for most of the post Civil War period. See also Robert Wooster's The Military and United States Indian Policy 1865-1903 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) which proposes that the military's performance against the Indians was inconsistent because of inconsistent national strategy and inadequate military strategy for Indian warfare.

<sup>20</sup> This relationship was further strained by the initiation of Grant's "Peace Policy" in 1868, which stressed the civilianization of government relationships with the Indians, to include the replacement of all military officers involved with administration of the Indian Agencies with civilian appointees.

<sup>21</sup> Utley, 197-199. Sheridan's comments on treatment of the Indians, contained in Annual Report of the Secretary of War (Washington, DC: Headquarters of the Army,

1875), 57, highlights both the aim of Grant's Peace Policy and the Army's concern with the Indian Bureau's record of caring for the Indians:

To accomplish this purpose, to civilize, make self-supporting, and save many more of these poor people than otherwise will be saved, I believe it best to transfer the Indian Bureau to the military, and let it be taken under the general administration of the Army, governed and controlled in responsibility of accounts in accordance with our present system. The Indians will thus be humanely and honestly dealt with, and, I believe, if this had always been the case, there would have been few of the troubles and bloody records which have characterized the civilization of the Indians in the many years gone by.

<sup>22</sup> Hutton, 24-25. Sheridan's transfer was by direct order of President Johnson, angered by Sheridan's aggressive application of Reconstruction Laws in Texas and Louisiana.

<sup>23</sup> General Philip H. Sheridan, Personal Memoirs ( NY: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1888).

<sup>24</sup> Utley, 147 - 164.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 307.

<sup>26</sup> Utley, 163.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Sheridan, 299.

<sup>29</sup> Utley, 163.

<sup>30</sup> Sheridan. 478-479. Sheridan personally commanded the expedition until called to Washington, DC in March 1869 for promotion to Lieutenant General and reassignment to Command of the Division of the Missouri.

<sup>31</sup> Utley, 220.

<sup>32</sup> Hutton, 249. While Sheridan believed that ignoring military department lines would facilitate pursuit of the Indians regardless of their location, he was reluctant to limit or over-control his department commanders by appointing an overall expedition commander. The actions of Sheridan's subordinates, Pope and Augur, reflect their personalities, experiences, and subordinates. Augur was a capable administrator who

preferred to leave vigorous campaigning to his younger subordinates. Pope, however, was a difficult subordinate, convinced of his own superior talents, and intensely focused on repairing a Civil War reputation tarnished by his relief following the battle of Second Manassas.

<sup>33</sup> Utley 245.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 227-229.

<sup>35</sup> Hutton, 251.

<sup>36</sup> Utley, 236.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 237. Miles complained about almost every aspect of this campaign, especially the lack of a single commander. Miles believed that he, of course, should have been the overall expedition commander.

<sup>39</sup> Hutton, 260-261.

<sup>40</sup> Senate, U.S. Congress, Treaty between the United States of America and Different Tribes of Sioux Indians, Concluded April 29, 1868; Ratification Advised February 16, 1869 (Washington, DC, 1869). This treaty is analyzed in detail in John S. Gray's Centennial Campaign: The Sioux War of 1876 (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> P.E. Byrne, Soldiers of the Plains (NY: Minton, Balch, and Company, 1926), 16.

<sup>42</sup> The Sioux War of 1876 did not involve the entire Sioux nation. According to Gray, 308-320, the Sioux participants in this conflict were primarily from the Teton Division of the Sioux Nation, comprising the Oglala, Brule, Hunkpapa, Miniconjou, Sans Arc, Two Kettle, and Blackfeet Sioux. Gray estimates that of approximately 22,000 Sioux and Cheyenne in the area of operations of the Sioux War of 1876, only 8000 were actually absent from the Agencies during the height of war, of which at most 2150 were warriors.

<sup>43</sup> Byrne, 14.

<sup>44</sup> Utley, 250.

<sup>45</sup> Crook intensely disliked the order to expel miners from the Black Hills. In his annual report for 1875, included in Annual Report of the Secretary of War

(Washington, DC: Headquarters of the Army, 1875), 70, Crook attempted to defend the miners and predicted future conflict with the Indians:

I respectfully submit that their side of the story should be heard, as the settlers who develop our mines and open the frontier to civilization are the nation's wards no less than their unfortunate fellows, the Indians. In any event, unless some arrangement can be made this winter by which the Indians will be satisfied to cede the mining region, my impression is that serious trouble will ensue when the miners attempt to return, as I believe they will by early spring.

<sup>46</sup> Gray, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 24-25.

<sup>48</sup> Although no transcripts of the discussion during this meeting exist, this interpretation of the 3 November 1875 meeting is generally accepted as the genesis of the government's decision to fight the Sioux. See Edgar I. Stewart, Custer's Luck (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 68; Utley, 252-254; Gray, 23-30.

<sup>49</sup> Stewart, 69.

<sup>50</sup> Letter, Sheridan to Sherman, 4 January 1876, "Special Files" of Headquarters, Division of the Missouri, Relating to Military Operations and Administration, 1863-1885, M1495 (hereafter referred to as "Special Files"), National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter referred to as NARA).

<sup>51</sup> U.S. Army, Annual Report of the Secretary of War (Washington, DC: Headquarters of the Army, 1876), 442.

<sup>52</sup> Stewart, 77-78. In addition, Byrne, 27, notes that some Indians probably did not receive the notification in enough time to comply, given the distance and weather.

<sup>53</sup> Letter, Chandler to Secretary of War, 1 February 1876, RG 393, Department of the Platte, Letters Received, NARA.

<sup>54</sup> Letter, Sherman to Sheridan, 7 February 1876, RG 393, Department of the Platte, Letters Received, NARA.

<sup>55</sup> Letter, Sheridan to Crook, 8 February 1876, RG 393, Department of the Platte, Letters Received, NARA.

<sup>56</sup> The quantity of Sioux lodges in the unceded territory in November 1875, according to the Indian Bureau report cited in the Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1876, 440, was 30-40 lodges with Sitting Bull's band and 120 lodges with Crazy Horse's band.

<sup>57</sup> Letter, Sheridan to Terry, 9 February, 1876, "Special Files", NARA.

<sup>58</sup> Report of the Secretary of War, 1876, 502.

<sup>59</sup> Utley, 257-258. See also Hutton, 426 and Schmitt, Martin F., Ed., General George Crook: His Autobiography (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 192. Sheridan concurred with Crook's recommendation. Reynolds was court-martialed for misbehavior before the enemy in January 1877 and convicted. Following remission of his sentence by President Grant, Reynolds retired in June 1877.

<sup>60</sup> Roger Darling, A Sad and Terrible Blunder: Generals Terry and Custer at the Little Big Horn: New Discoveries (Vienna, VA: Potomac-Western Press, 1990), 17. Darling contends that Terry was actually capable of moving in April, but delayed movement pending Custer's return from testifying at the Belknap inquiry in Washington, DC. Darling's study examines the complex relationship between Custer and Terry both before and during this campaign and finds Terry at fault for failing to adequately coordinate the actions of his subordinates, leading directly to Custer's defeat.

<sup>61</sup> Utley, 259.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>64</sup> Report of the Secretary of War, 1876, 29-30.

<sup>65</sup> Gray, 357.

<sup>66</sup> Utley, 260. A lodge equates to six to eight Indians, of which two are probably warriors.

<sup>67</sup> Telegram, Sheridan to Terry, 16 May 1876, Division of the Missouri, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>68</sup> Gray, 338.

<sup>69</sup> Utley, 263.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>71</sup> 18 June 1876 NY Herald article, cited in Stewart, 242. Stewart contends that this article was authored by a member of Terry's forces, most likely Major Brisbin, Commander of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment troops in Gibbon's column.

<sup>72</sup> Gray, 164-165.

<sup>73</sup> Gray, 294. Custer's Regiment suffered 263 fatalities at the Little Big Horn. The exact numbers of Sioux and Cheyenne casualties are unknown, but were only a fraction of the Seventh Cavalry's losses. Other studies of the Custer Massacre include Stephen E. Ambrose's Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors (NY: New American Library, 1975); and W.A. Graham, The Custer Myth (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1953). See also Stewart, Darling, and Charles G. Dubois, The Custer Mystery (El Segundo, CA: Upton and Sons, 1986).

<sup>74</sup> Utley, 276-280; Paul L. Hedren, Fort Laramie in 1876: Chronicle of a Frontier Post (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 319.

<sup>75</sup> John G. Bourke, On the Border with Crook (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 341.

<sup>76</sup> Hutton, 323-324. Following an Indian trail into the Black Hills, Crook's column ran short of rations and was forced to slaughter many of their expedition-worn pack mules for food. This column did succeed in striking a Sioux band at Slim Buttes on 9 September, but the troops were so exhausted from the campaign that pursuit of the fleeing hostiles was impossible.

<sup>77</sup> Utley, 281.

<sup>78</sup> Cohen and Gooch, 26-27.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Sherman and Sheridan realized the impact of this error only when the campaign was essentially finished. In a February 1877 letter to Sheridan, for example, Sherman stated that the failure to have a single commander was "a bad thing" for which "You and I are responsible;" see letter, Sherman to Sheridan, 21 February 1877, cited in Wooster, 169-170.

<sup>82</sup> Hutton, 305.



<sup>83</sup> Darling, 1; Byrne, 171.

<sup>84</sup> Darling, 263.

<sup>85</sup> Sherman recognized that Sheridan was the best individual to command the Army's operations against the Sioux Indians, but admonished him to leave the situation to his subordinates and stay close to his headquarters, because ". . . the South may become again the theatre of trouble, and here you are equally necessary, as illustrated by having the Gulf Dept. added to your vast area of command." See letter, Sherman to Sheridan, 1 April 1876, cited in Hutton, 305.

<sup>86</sup> Hutton, 273-276.

<sup>87</sup> Telegram, Sheridan to Terry, 16 May 1876, Division of the Missouri, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA

<sup>88</sup> By mid-May 1876, Terry estimated that 1500 Indian lodges were now in his department. Crook similarly saw the extent of Indian departures when he visited the Red Cloud Agency in May and unsuccessfully attempted to recruit Indian auxiliaries from the reservation dwellers. Further confirming the size of the Indian migrations, on 23 June 1876, the Secretary of War informed Sheridan that at least 2000 Indians had left the Red Cloud Agency since 10 May 1876. This report, and others, confirmed Merritt's 8 June report that conditions were deteriorating at the Agencies and an estimated 3000 warriors were now in the unceded territories. See Telegram, Sheridan to Crook, 16 May 1876, Division of the Missouri, Letters Sent, RG 393; Hedren, 76, 92, 100; and Letter, Secretary of War to Sheridan, Department of the Platte. Letters Received, RG 393;

<sup>89</sup> Sheridan thought little of the warning: "The matter of notifying the Indians to come in is perhaps well to put on paper, but will in all probability be regarded as a good joke by the Indians." Letter, Sheridan to Sherman, 4 February, 1876. "Special Files," NARA.

<sup>90</sup> Gray, Centennial Campaign, 357.

<sup>91</sup> Telegram, Sheridan to Terry, 16 May 1876.

<sup>92</sup> Stewart, 95-96.

<sup>93</sup> Charles King, Indian Campaigns (Ft Collins, CO: Old Army Press, 1984), 43. King states that Crook was transferred from Arizona in 1875 because he had successfully subjugated the Indians there and the impending conflict on the northern plains demanded a leader of his proven capability.

<sup>94</sup> Letter, Sheridan to Terry, 18 February 1876. Department of the Platte, Letters Received, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>95</sup> Byrne notes that Crook wrote fewer written orders and letters than any other Army officer of comparable rank; Byrne, 36. In comparison, Terry wrote Sheridan frequently, reporting his location, intentions, and requesting information about Crook's operations.

<sup>96</sup> Utley, 276.

<sup>97</sup> Hutton, 319. Reinforcements were transferred from posts as far away as the Great Lakes and Philadelphia.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 320-321.

<sup>99</sup> Letter, Sheridan to Crook, 16 July 1876, Department of the Platte, Letters received, RG 393.

<sup>100</sup> Hutton, 321.

<sup>101</sup> Letter, Miles to Sherman, cited in Utley, 285.

<sup>102</sup> Gray, 339-341.

<sup>103</sup> According to J. R. Cook's essay in Paul L. Hedren's The Great Sioux War 1876-1877 (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1991), 103, Sheridan personally condoned, indeed encouraged, the wholesale slaughter of the buffalo, as demonstrated by Sheridan's 1875 comments about commercial buffalo hunters:

They are destroying the Indians' commissary; and it is a well known fact that an army losing its base of supplies is placed at a great disadvantage . . . for the sake of lasting peace, let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffalo are exterminated . . .

<sup>104</sup> The School of Advanced Military Studies curriculum reflects this pattern, with its study of operational art moving directly from the American Civil War to Koniggratz and then to World War I.

<sup>105</sup> Byrne, 159-160.

<sup>106</sup> Utley, 269

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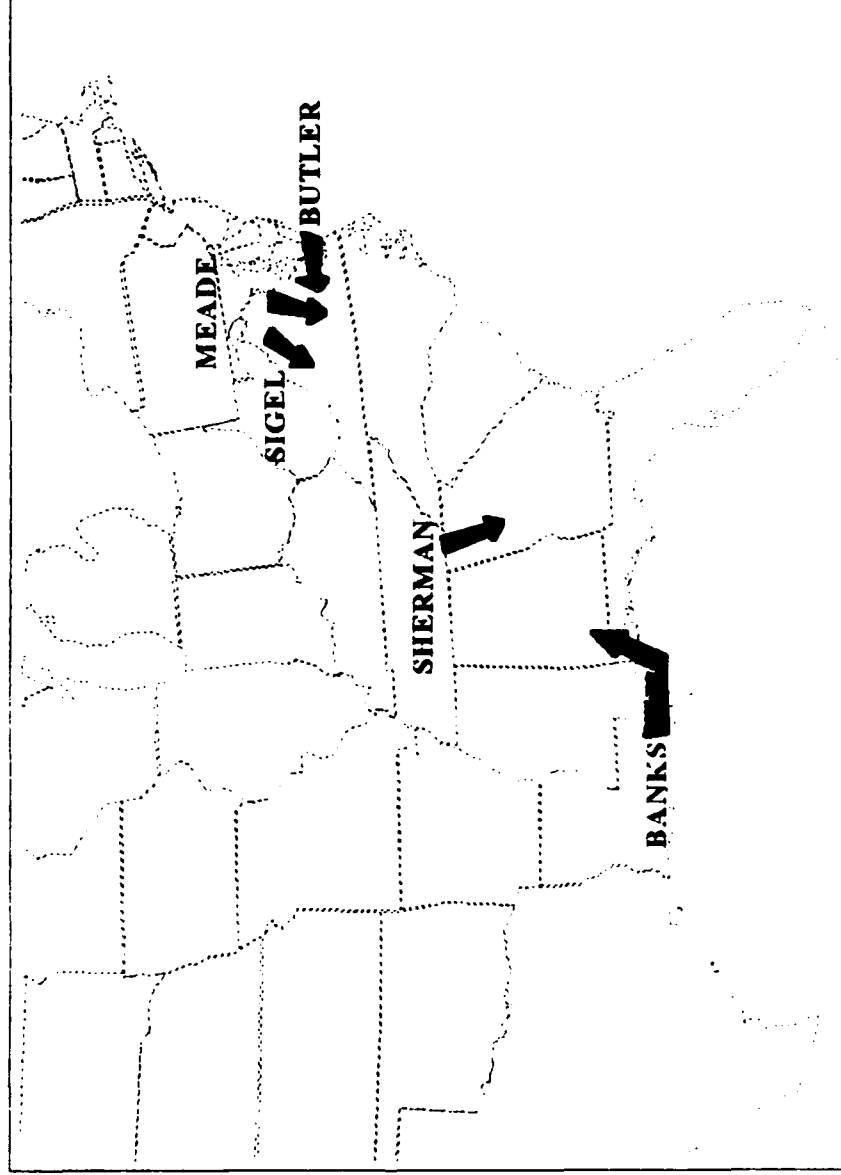
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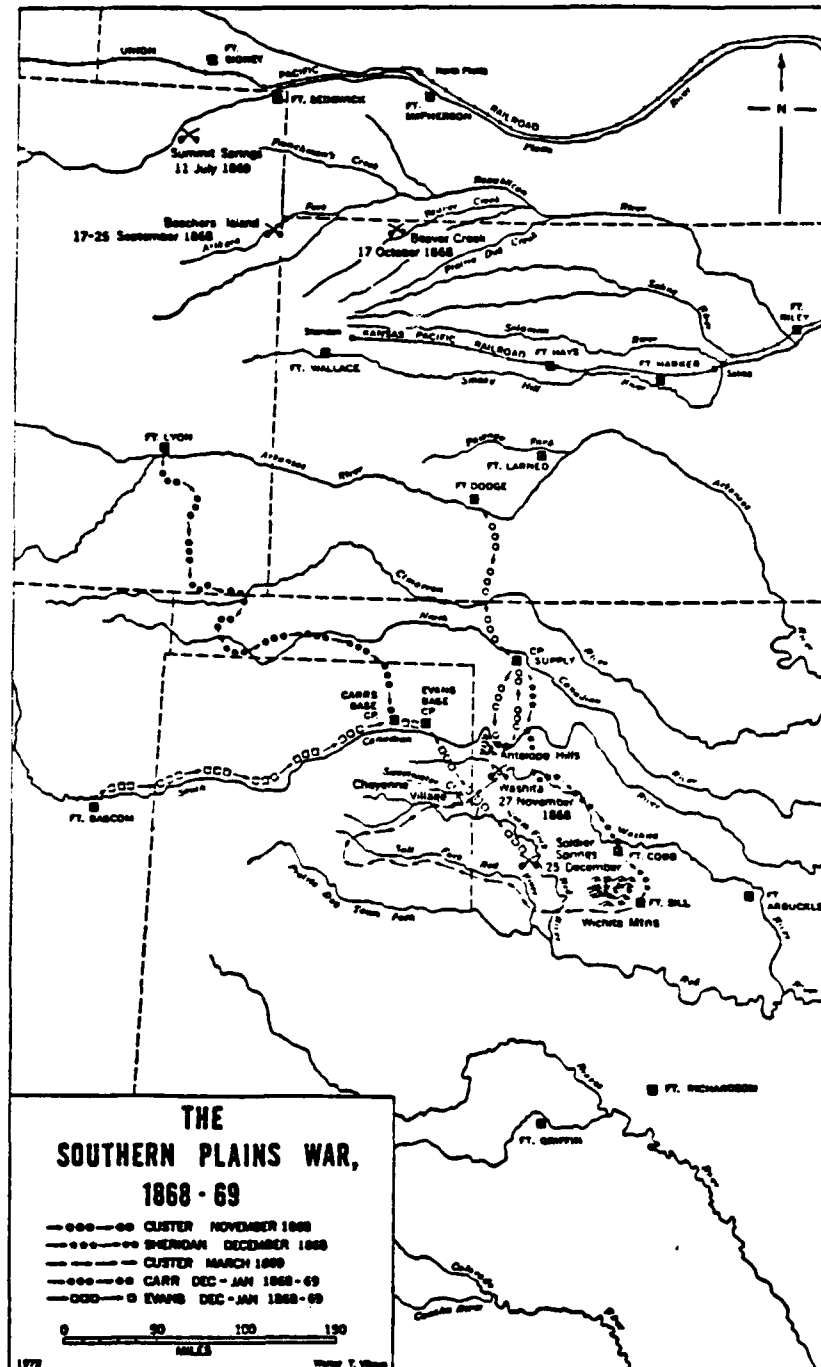
Appendix A. Map 1: The Union Campaign of 1864-1865





## Appendix A. Map 2: The Southern Plains War of 1868-1869

(Reprinted from Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, by Robert Utley, Copyright 1973.)



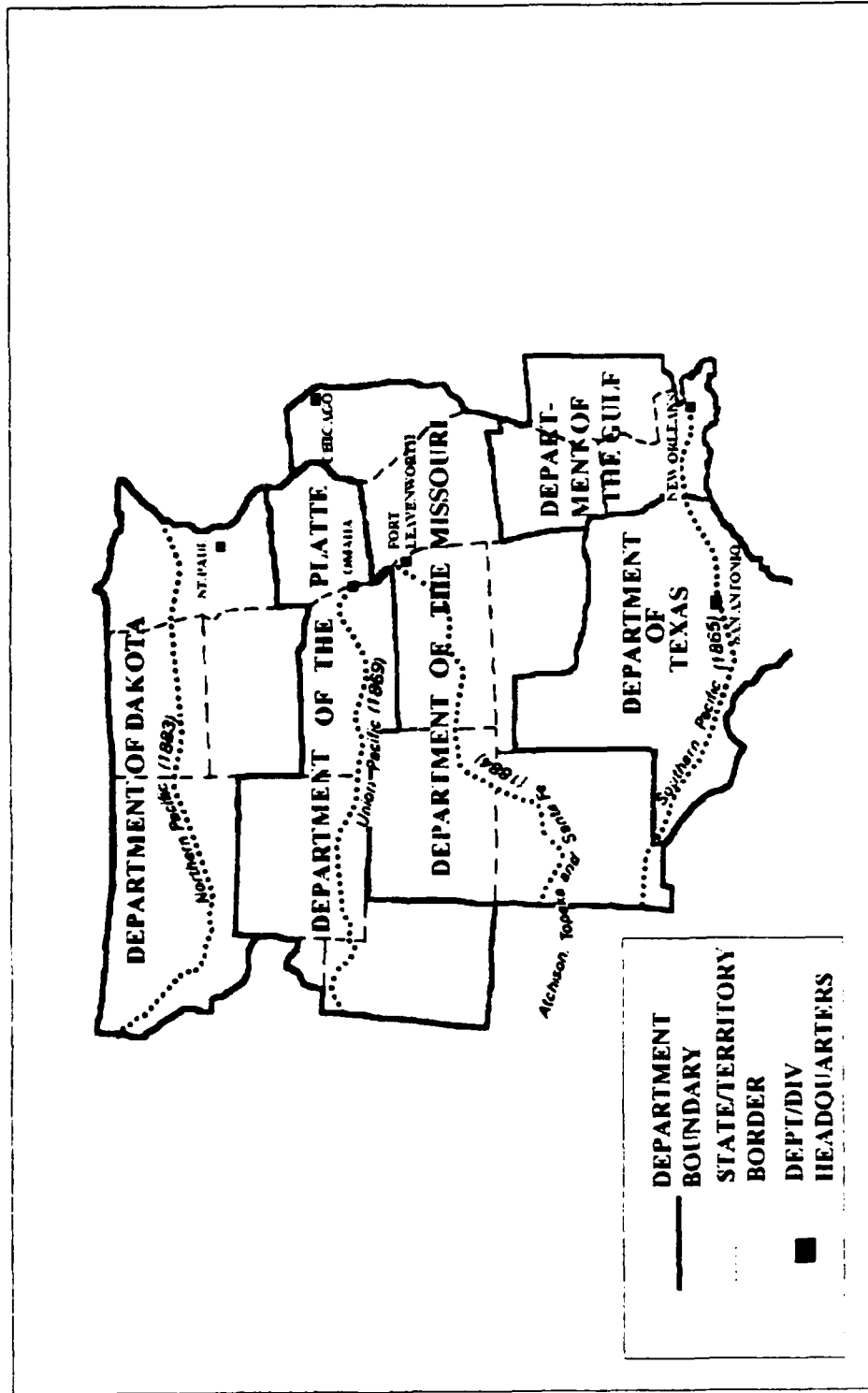
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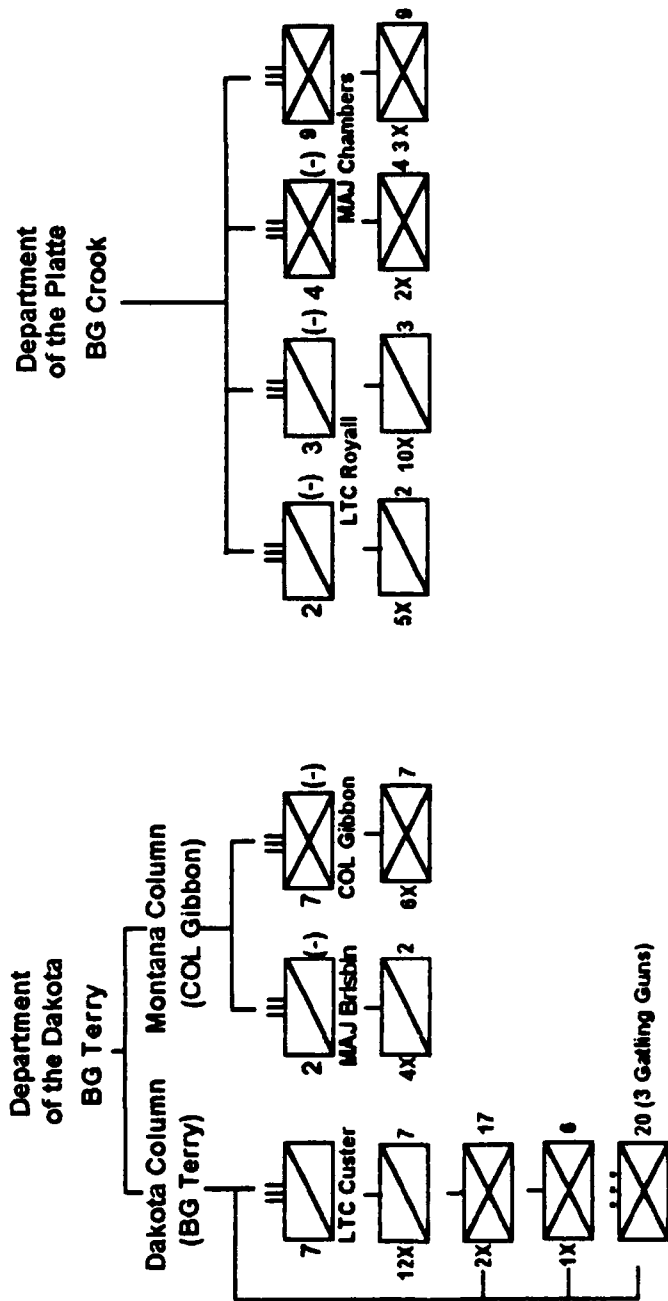


Appendix B. Organization of the Division of the Missouri, 1876

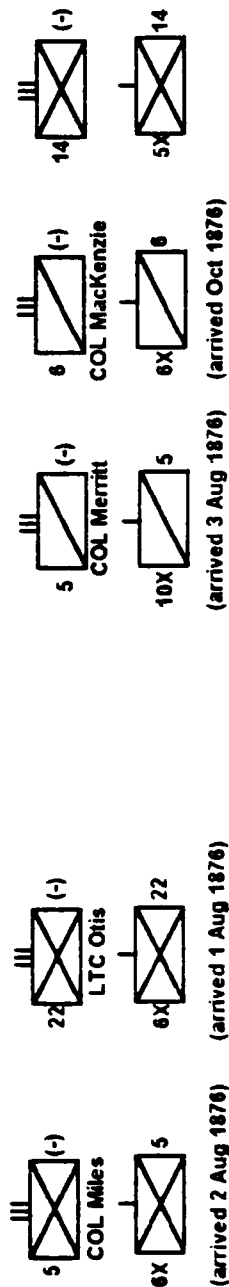


# Appendix C. U.S. Army Units in the Sioux War of 1876

Organization as of 1 Jun 1876 (does not reflect supply trains or Indian scouts/auxiliaries):



Post Little Big Horn Reinforcements:



#### **Appendix D. Sioux War Chronology, 1866-1876**

<b>Jun-Dec 1866</b>	<b>Sioux initiate Red Cloud's War in response to establishment of Powder River Forts</b>
<b>21 Dec 1866</b>	<b>Fetterman Massacre</b>
<b>Feb-Jun 1867</b>	<b>Sanborn Commission concludes that cause of hostilities with Sioux was military incursions on Bozeman Trail</b>
<b>20 Jul 1867</b>	<b>Peace Commission established</b>
<b>Fall 1867- Summer 1868</b>	<b>Army abandons Powder River Forts</b>
<b>1868</b>	<b>Treaty of 1868 defines Great Sioux Reservation and establishes Indian Agencies in Reservation</b>
<b>1868-1869</b>	<b>Southern Plains War</b>
<b>10 Apr 1869</b>	<b>Congress creates new Board of Indian Commissioners</b>
<b>29 Jun 1869</b>	<b>Sheridan issues order declaring all Indians off reservations are "hostile"</b>
<b>1873-1874</b>	<b>Indian Raids on Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies inspire White River Expedition</b>
<b>Jun-Sep 1873</b>	<b>Stanley railroad survey expedition</b>
<b>4/11 Aug 1873</b>	<b>Tongue River Battles</b>
<b>Autumn 1873</b>	<b>Sheridan obtains permission to conduct survey in preparation of constructing a fort in Black Hills</b>
<b>Mar 1874</b>	<b>White River Expedition pushes Sioux Raiding Parties back to Reservations</b>
<b>Jul - Aug 1874</b>	<b>Black Hills Expedition surveys Black Hills and reports traces of gold</b>
<b>Autumn 1874</b>	<b>President Grant charges Army to keep prospectors out of Black Hills</b>

1874-1875	Red River War on the Southern Plains
Spring 1875	General Crook transferred to Department of the Platte
7 Apr 1875	Army removes prospectors from Custer Gulch, Black Hills
May-Aug 1875	Black Hills Geologic Survey Expedition
May-Jun 1875	Sioux Chiefs Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Visit Washington and discuss sale of Black Hills
Sep 1875	Special Commission visits Red Cloud Agency, where Sioux refuse sale of Black Hills
3 Nov 1875	White House meeting on Sioux and Black Hills
3 Nov 1875	Sheridan message to Terry to stop enforcing rules forbidding entry of miners into Black Hills
9 Nov 1875	Inspector Watkins recommends attack of Sioux off reservations
6 Dec 1875	Commissioner Smith instructs Sioux Agents to tell Indians in unceded territory to move to reservations by 31 Jan 1876
Winter 1875-1876	Estimated 15,000 Miners in Black Hills
1 Feb 1876	Secretary Chandler tells Secretary Belknap that non-reservation Indians are now Army's responsibility
7 Feb 1876	Army receives authority to begin campaign against Sioux
8 Feb 1876	Sheridan signals advance to Crook and Terry
27 Feb 1876	Terry instructs Gibbon to block Indians driven north by Crook's movements.
1 Mar 1876	Bighorn Expedition departs Fort Fetterman
17 Mar 1876	Montana Column departs Fort Shaw
17 Mar 1876	Powder River Battle
30 Mar 1876	Montana Column departs Fort Ellis

16 May 1876	Scout from Gibbon's column identifies large Indian Camp on Tongue River
17 May 1876	Fort Abraham Lincoln force departs under Terry's command
27 May 1876	Scout from Gibbon's column identifies large Indian camp in Rosebud Valley
29 May 1876	Crook departs Fortt Fetterman
June 1876	Estimated 1000 lodges in unceded territory
9 Jun 1876	Terry and Gibbon meet, finalize their plans
17 Jun 1876	Crook attacked by Sioux at Rosebud Crook and returns to Supply Base at Goose Creek
21 Jun 1876	Terry, Gibbon, Custer, and Brisbane meet and finalize plans
22 Jun 1876	Custer and 7th Cavalry move south
24 Jun 1876	Custer deviates from Terry's Plan by turning west prematurely
25 Jun 1876 (Dawn)	Indian Village reported to Custer; Custer decides to attack
25 Jun 1876 (1200)	Custer splits force into three elements and attacks village
26 Jun 1876	Indians continue attack on Reno and Benteen; Indian Village starts moving south
26 Jun 1876	Day Gibbon is supposed to be at north mouth of Little Big Horn River
27 Jun 1876	Terry and Gibbon's forces discover 7th Cavalry survivors
Summer 1876	Congress approves funds for two Yellowstone forts
10 Jul 1876	Crook orders 5th Cavalry (Merritt) to join expedition
17 Jul 1876	5th Cav fights War Bonnet Creek Battle
26 Jul 1876	Army given control of Sioux agencies
3 Aug 1876	5th Cavalry joins Crook at Goose Creek



5 Aug 1876	Crook heads north along Rosebud Creek valley
8 Aug 1876	Terry Heads south along Rosebud Creek valley
10 Aug 1876	Terry and Crook meet at juncture of Rosebud Creek and Indian trail
9 Sep 1876	Battle of Slim Buttes
Autumn 1876	Black Hills Commission of 1876 visits Agencies and forces Sioux relinquishment of Black Hills
Oct 1876	Indians at Red Cloud, Standing Rock, and Cheyenne River Agencies disarmed.